

**MODIFICATION OF HOV HOURS OF OPERATION  
EASTSIDE FREEWAYS SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT**

**BRIEFING PAPER**

Prepared for the  
April 2003 Transportation Commission Meeting

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Approved by: John Conrad, Assistant Secretary for Engineering and Regional Operations  
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**PURPOSE:**

This is the quarterly progress report to the Commission regarding the implementation of operational changes to the freeway HOV System.

**ACTION/OUTCOME:**

The Commission is updated on actions related to modifying the operation of East King County freeway HOV lanes to allow general purpose use nightly between the hours of 7:00 PM and 5:00 AM.

**BACKGROUND:**

On January 16, 2003 by Resolution 643, the Commission directed the Department to proceed with allowing Eastside segments of the HOV System to operate in general purpose mode during night time hours. Prior to the change in operation, the Department must implement necessary safety enhancements and conduct a reasonable program of public awareness.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Project Design**

The contract plans for the Eastside Freeways Safety Improvements project are in final review within the NW Region. The project will replace HOV signing, install shoulder rumble strips or enhanced lane edge stripe, and install guardrail along segments of I-90, I-405, SR-520 and SR-167. Additional field review along I-90 revealed that approximately ½-mile length of existing guardrail has deteriorated posts and must be replaced.

The project advertisement date is April 14<sup>th</sup>. Construction work will be conducted between June and August, dependent on weather. SR-520 signs have been ordered and will be installed by state maintenance forces in mid-May.

WSDOT and Washington State Patrol staff will be meeting April 10<sup>th</sup> to discuss phasing of the operational changes and coordination of enforcement.

The current Engineer's estimate for this project is \$1.4 Million. This is a slight increase over what was previously reported at the last Commission meeting because of the addition of the aforementioned guardrail.

### **Project Permits**

Noise permits have been secured from eight jurisdictions. Approval is forthcoming from the City of Bothell. A hearing was held April 1<sup>st</sup> in Renton. The Renton Board of Public Works approved the noise permit. The permit will be issued in two weeks following an additional comment period. The Department expects to secure all permits within a week following contract advertisement.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Ecology (DOE) and Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (PSCAA) concur that this project does not require an amendment of the State Implementation Plan (SIP). The Department is awaiting letters from DOE and PSCAA documenting this concurrence. They have committed to delivering these the week of March 31<sup>st</sup>.

All other environmental permits and approvals are secured.

### **Project Approvals**

Toby Rickman, the State Traffic Engineer, approved a traffic regulation on March 17<sup>th</sup> that allows for the general purpose operations within the Eastside HOV lanes between the hours of 7:00 PM and 5:00 AM. Mr. Rickman approved the project Design Documentation File on March 28<sup>th</sup>.

The Department submitted project documentation to FHWA on February 13<sup>th</sup> and received comments back on March 12<sup>th</sup>. All comments have been addressed to the satisfaction of FHWA and they will be responding with a letter of approval for the project within the next couple days. The Department must still forward to FHWA the aforementioned letters regarding the SIP as soon as they are available.

### **Project Communication Plan**

The Department has developed a communications plan targeting a regional audience, using mostly media relations, that will be initiated prior to commencement of the SR-520 work. The plan identifies these key messages:

- The changeover will be instituted on a highway-by-highway basis, beginning with SR-520 in May
- All drivers will benefit from the safety improvements to the corridors
- Opening the HOV lanes at 7 p.m. is anticipated to help relieve congestion while traffic volumes are still significant, especially along portions of I-405
- Opening the HOV lanes to general-purpose traffic between 7 p.m. and 5 a.m. doesn't impact transit travel time reliability
- The lanes will be opened following construction of safety improvements and signage costing about \$1.4 million

**RECOMMENDATION:**

No action by the Commission is requested.

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